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SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS MASS DISPLACEMENT NEAR TUMACO, NARINO -
LESSONS FROM THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

REF: A. BOGOTA 3108

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 4045

Summary

[1](#)1. Since mid-September, the GOC, local officials, and several international groups have helped over 1000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the Awa indigenous group in Inda Sabaleta, near Tumaco, Narino. The Awa were displaced by Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) incursions in local villages as well as FARC clashes with the Colombian military. The GOC and international humanitarian groups made a concerted effort to register and aid the Awa, but were hampered by the area's remoteness and difficult terrain, the lack of security, and poor coordination between the GOC, international groups and local authorities. The GOC and international groups are developing new strategies that reflect the lessons learned from the Awa experience to address future displacements in southern Colombia. End Summary.

Mass Displacement of Indigenous Awa near Tumaco

[1](#)2. In mid-September, over 1000 Awa indigenous were displaced from their villages in remote, southeastern coastal parts of Narino department. The UN Office Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) reported that the IDPs were fleeing from September 18 clashes between the Colombian military and FARC near the village of Inda Sabaleta, and September 20 FARC incursions into villages in Cumbitara municipality. Days before these events, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) had warned of the possibility of such mass displacements. In addition to increased FARC activity, including FARC laying of landmines, the group detected other danger signs such as a growing Organizacion Nueva Generacion presence, on-going GOC military operations, and an increase in overall general violence (murders occurred at a rate of 200 per 100,000 in 2007).

Initial Humanitarian Response

¶3. The GOC and international groups received first news of the mass displacement within a few days, but needed several weeks to clarify the total number of IDPs, their locations, and living conditions. Initial visits to Inda Sabaleta by the GOC's Accion Social's Emergency Coordinator, PAHO and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were hampered by the lack of security and water-logged dirt roads. Within a week of the IDP arrivals, the ICRC, PAHO, IOM (International Organization for Migration), and GOC agencies (Accion Social, Instituto Bienestar Familiar de Colombia or ICBF) were on the ground providing basic emergency aid - food/non-food items, emergency and hygiene kits, and some health and shelter assistance.

Conditions Complicate IDP Census and Extent of Response

¶4. As with the El Charco mass displacement in April (reftel A), taking an accurate census of the IDP population was difficult. Upon first arrival, ICRC and Accion Social conducted a census that concluded that most IDPs were in school buildings in Inda Sabaleta. The census assumed the indigenous would stay together in temporary shelters and nearby homes and that there would be little dispersion to other parts of the village. In the first delivery, ICRC and the Tumaco municipality, in coordination with Accion Social, assisted only 626 IDPs.

¶5. Days later, the indigenous advocacy group, Cabildo Indigena, claimed that many IDPs were staying with local residents well away from the center of Inda Sabaleta and had been missed in the initial census. The UN / Interagency

Standing Committee (IASC) assessment mission later confirmed this. In addition to delivering more basic aid, the IASC mission conducted a needs assessment that recommended that the GOC and humanitarian actors provide other aid to the area, especially in the sectors of water/sanitation and housing.

¶6. In early October, Narino reps of the IASC - OCHA, PAHO, IOM, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Program (WFP) - committed to providing additional aid. For example, UNHCR supplied five, 2000 liter water tanks to the area, and PAHO brought in engineers to install water purifiers at the shelters. IOM and ICBF brought in emergency medical response teams. After meeting with the IASC and Accion Social, the ICRC returned the week of October 20 and carried out a second distribution of aid materials to 530 IDPs. ICRC noted that 500 (195 families) had already returned to their home villages.

¶7. Besides the problematic census, the lack of cooperation by local authorities in Tumaco was a major problem. UNHCR and ICRC reported that the mayor of Tumaco was uncooperative - even refusing to work with Accion Social reps (similar to the El Charco displacement reftel A). Still, the Tumaco municipality formed a committee for Integrated IDP response and eventually participated in aid effort.

Current Situation

¶8. ICRC and IOM report that since mid-October, Accion Social's Emergency Response team (reftel B) has the lead in providing and coordinating aid. ICRC has made a third delivery of aid. PAHO and the Narino Departmental Health Authorities (IDSN) are actively coordinating the health sector. IOM and ICBF established six community kitchens, cafeterias, and spaces for the IDPs and resident population. By early December, all but 200 of the IDPs had returned to their villages. IOM reports that Accion Social and ICBF have set up programs close to return areas. For example, ICBF, in collaboration with IDSN, has deployed emergency medical teams

to these areas.

¶9. The security situation near Tumaco has remained calm, but the situation continues to be unstable. UNHCR warned that unless there is greater presence by Public Forces - police and military - to keep peace and protect the population, additional mass displacements in the area are likely.

Changes in International Response Methods in Narino

¶10. The mass displacement in Tumaco is just one of 27 that have occurred in Narino in 2007. Most recently, 700 were displaced by FARC actions to Iscaunde in the north near Cauca department, and 148 were displaced to Sidon near Policarpa at the foothills of the western Andes. Due to their frequency, the GOC, Narino authorities and international groups are working to improve coordination, communication and response to mass displacements. New steps include:

- The ICRC has dedicated more resources to Narino and Pacific Coastal regions, including shifting personnel from Putumayo and deploying a census specialist immediately after reports of a mass displacement (50 or more persons, ten or more families).

- UNHCR and PAHO, working with Accion Social, will continue with assessment missions in Narino to identify areas at risk for violence and displacement. UNHCR has arranged with the Defensoria in Tumaco and Gaupi (just north of the Cauca / Narino department borders) to monitor changes in the security situation and help at-risk communities update response contingency plans.

- IASC assessment missions will continue to use and deploy the rapid response/needs assessment technique (known as "ILA") that was piloted in their late September mission to Inda Sabaleta.

- The Narino UN IASC team and departmental authorities are developing a plan to maintain emergency aid stocks in a centralized location in Narino, readily deployable as situations warrant. The department will provide the facility, and the UN will stock it with supplies.

Brownfield